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ABSTRACT

A discussion of writing looks at research on the factors influencing written discourse and proposes a model of writing for academic purposes. First, studies of both cultural and individual aspects of the writing process are reviewed and the phenomenon of writing is viewed from both social and cognitive perspectives. The social perspective is that of purpose and audience, and the cognitive is that of a complex process of divergent thinking, incubation, idea organization, and activation of schemata. A model of school-based (academic) writing that considers the dimension of purpose (audience) and related cognitive processes (content) is then outlined and its implications for creation of writing assignments and the evaluation of writing are discussed. The model is based on a system of classification of written composition as documentary, constative (narrative, descriptive, or explanatory), or exploratory (interpretive or literary) and of the writing's dominant intention or purpose, the primary audience, the salient cognitive processes used, and its primary content. A 34-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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GENERAL MODEL OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE AS A BASIS FOR A STUDY OF WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Before any descriptive study of student performance in writing can proceed it is necessary to make a conceptual clarification of the object of the study: writing in general and the domain of school-based writing. It is particularly important since the domain of written composition proves to be fairly diffuse and no generally accepted model is readily available.

After an analysis of the factors influencing writing an attempt is made to construct a general model which would present a balanced view of the domain of writing. The model has been developed for several purposes: (1) to describe and evaluate the types of written composition tasks used in different countries, (2) to evaluate the quality of the writing curriculum in schools, (3) to construct a questionnaire which explores teaching practices.

The model describes the domain of school writing in terms of two major dimensions: (a) the purpose of writing and (b) the cognitive processes related to writing. The purpose of writing relates to audience, and the level of cognitive processing to content.

1. Writing from a cultural and individual point of view

In discussing the study of written discourse it should at first be asked what distinguishes writing from other forms of language, such as speaking. The significance of written language from the point of view of cultural and personal development has been extensively analyzed in several articles by David Olson. According to Olson (1976: 1977), the invention of the alphabet and the development of writing gave Western culture most of its characteristic features, including a changed view of language and rationality. When language was transformed from the spoken mode to the written one, the dominant picture of the world was also changed: language and reality were partly reorganized and reinterpreted. Similar views have been presented by Bruner (1968: 1972). According to him, written language frees people from a dependence on the immediate context.

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Olson also draws our attention to the point that a transition from spoken to written language reduced the heavy reliance on memory and released cognitive capacity, so that more attention could be devoted to the meaning of statements and, especially, to the implications which can be drawn from written statements. When cultural heritage no longer needed to be transmitted to the new generation orally, relying solely on memory, it became possible to create original expressions. It also introduced the possibility of easy documentation, which was the first function of writing in societies. Subsequently, written language has typically served specialized cultural and civilizational purposes in those societies that have utilized the latent possibilities of language more fully by employing also written language. Such functions include, for example, literature, mass communication and research.

Both Vygotsky (1962) and Olson have emphasized that the cognitive development of an individual is manifested in a growing degree of ability to manage explicit meaning. Its starting point is utterance, which, however, specifies only part of meaning. Language development means that a child learns to master the conventions for transferring an increasing part of meaning into verbal mode. Thus a child moves from a situation in which two different meanings are conveyed by means of one identical expression to a situation in which meaning is transferred largely into sentences and text, ie. meaning becomes explicit (Bloom 1970). Writing makes it possible to produce text which is more autonomous and decontextualized than spoken text. Thus, the mastery of writing heralds a critical turning point in the entire cultural and cognitive development of children. Emig (1977) also supports the notion that writing is a unique form of learning.

However, some cross-cultural studies (eg., Scribner and Cole 1981) have indicated that the acquisition of literacy does not necessarily entail a generalized facilitation of higher cognitive processes. It seems more likely that the uses of literacy in society are of decisive importance. Thus the important question is who is literate in what languages for what purposes (Spolsky 1981).

It is reasonable to conclude then that what is important is the symbolic manipulation of experience through the use of the kind of language that possesses the characteristics which are typically, but not exclusively, found in written language. So, written language lends itself well to the kind of uses that tend to facilitate cognitive functioning.

In a discussion of the significance of writing from the individual's point of view, it should be emphasized that writing is an activity which

often allows, and even presupposes, personal initiative and the making of choices. Through the writing process, a person's knowledge and experience may be enlarged. In addition to such self-development, writing can also help to maintain mental balance even if, on the surface, the writer is not directly concerned on a matter of personal experience but is writing "behind the mask".

V.S. Naipaul describes this aspect of writing in the following way.

> I do not think writing is simply a skill you acquire, like making a suit or building a house, and then practise forever. One is a changed man at the end of every book one writes: one has discovered depths of responses that one never knew existed before. One has undergone a great experience of patterning, moulding, discovering thoughts and emotions. And since one writes with every sense, one has to be physically fit - you cannot write if you are not feeling well, if you have to be totally alert - and the exercise of all the senses together over several months does alter one.

2. The concept of writing

2.1. Writing as a phenomenon

The writing situation can be interpreted from both a social and a congnitive perspective:

(a) Writing can be regarded as an act of communication about some topic between the writer and the reader. This act of writing has a purpose, as has all or most human activity.

(b) Writing can also be regarded as a cognitive process in which the writer presents and/or reflects on either externally observable or internally experienced reality.

When writing is viewed from the social perspective, understanding the purpose and the audience become paramount. In all writing situations the basic goal of writing is to convey some message to the reader. The message is the writer's personal point of view of the topic and it, in turn, may differ according to the writer's purposes: whether the intention is to inform, argue, convey feelings, etc. Still, we need to remember that in social writing situations it is by no means always up to the writer to freely choose the purpose, but s/he is, in fact, constrained by the writing task and its conventions in the society.

The writer produces a text alone, without the immediate feedback, cooperation or negotiation with the reader. This monologue aspect of

writing is arguably the most important feature that distinguishes writing from face-to-face conversational interaction (Takala and Vähäpassi 1983).

Since the writer cannot have the readers' immediate feedback as a guide, writing imposes great demands on the communication through text. The text has to anticipate readers' possible responses (eg.,a lack or lagging of interest, comprehension and memory difficulties, objections, criticism, and deal with such such responses. In line with Grice's co-operative principle (Grice 1975), the writer and the reader are bound by mutual obligations: the writer is obligated to try to write a clear, relevant, truthful, informative, interesting and memorable text, while it is the reader's task to read the text and interpret it with due to regard to the writer's presumed purpose (intention).

From the point of view of communication, writers are always also readers of their own texts. Sometimes writing is only self-communication, which involves such reflection to clarify to writers themselves what they think (eg. Moffett 1984). Consequently, written language offers means not only for reflecting reality but also for creating reality, as Ricouer (1973) points out. Therefore the social and cognitive perspectives as determinants of the writing situation are clearly related to each other.

Viewed from the cognitive perspective, writing appears to be an immensely complex act, essentially inseparable from general thinking and learning. From the cognitive perspective, understanding the writing process becomes paramount. It proceeds roughly as follows:

Writers build their messages on ideas, observation and experiences. Before writing, they have to access them from their long-term memories and link them with new ideas. If the writing task is fact-oriented, they have to obtain new information, structure and evaluate it, and draw consistent conclusions from it. In situations of fictional writing, they may create new observations, experiences, milieux, or characters. This sequence of events can be called idea generation, and it will probably continue during the actual production of text. It can be identified with the first stage of divergent thinking: preparation, information gathering (eg., Guilford 1966, Flower and Hayes 1980).

The second stage of creative thinking is incubation, during which unconscious mental processes are going on. A similar process can be found in the writing process if writers have time to prepare their text. Often the writer's message takes shape during the incubation stage and the text-producing stage. There may occur a sudden insight, which is a unique

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experience for the writer although it may not be a new discovery for the reader.

However, in order to be able to convey the idea to the reader, the writer must be able to structure the information into a coherent whole. This ability can be called idea organization. It seems likely that the discovery of content often is accompanied by a suggestion of a possible textual form.

A writing task activates various kinds of schemata in the writer's long-term memory, ie. prototypical abstract knowledge structures which serve to process information in a way similar to concepts (eg., Rumelhart and Ortony 1977). From the point of view of text organization the most important are situation-based schemata and cognition-based schemata (eg., Brewer 1980, Nash 1980). The former are related especially to features of the communicative situation and the purpose of writing while the latter are linked more closely with rhetorical structures (eg., narrative, descriptive, expository). The mastery of such schemata determines to a large extent how well writers are able to manage their ideas and give shape to them.

The use of the written code itself sets distinct demands on writers: they have to process language on several levels (sentences, words and graphemes/letters) and to master the conventions of written language. Bereiter (1980) suggests that, in addition to genre schemata, the writer possesses schemata for language processing. This is not limited to the mastery of sentence structure, punctuation and spelling, but has to do with a deeper linguistic competence: the ability to recognize the special nature of writing as a medium for a generalized communication of messages, which transcends the here and now. It should make it possible to reach both a close and a remote addressee.

It does not seem an exaggeration to conclude from the foregoing discussion that writing resembles a multi-level process of creative thinking in which the writer has to be able to manage several kinds of skills at the same time. Through such a process, writers give linguistic expression to cognitive memory structures: experience, observations, and knowledge; and on the basis of them create an object of World Three (to use a term suggested by Karl Popper). This object of World Three, namely text, is or is not understood by the reader in line with the writer's purpose.

Schematically the above discussion can be presented as in Figure 1.

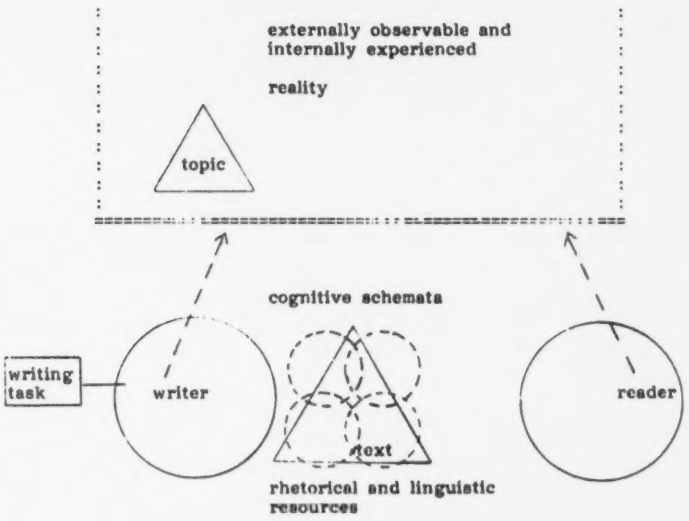

Figure 1. Contextual Factors in Writing Situation

The figure illustrates how one has to consider three main dimensions in the writing situation: (a) cognitive, (b) intersubjective, (c) linguistic and rhetorical.

The figure shows that in the cognitive dimension there are two relationships: the relationship between the referent/topic and the writer and the relationship between the referent and the reader. The more distant the topic is for the writer, the more cognitive effort s/he has to make and, correspondingly, the more distant the topic is for the reader, the more interpretive effort s/he has to make. In this effort to get hold of the referent by thinking, the writer's and the reader's schemata play an important role.

Between the writer and the reader there is an intersubjective distance, which the writer cannot bridge directly but only through his/her text (discourse). How the text will look like is influenced not only by personal schemata but also by individual linguistic and rhetorical resources. By these means the writer has to make an effort to make a transition from utterance to text, from writer meaning to explicit, literal meaning. The

writer uses them to reach his/her communicative goal and comes up with eg. narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative or instructive text. The figure also indicates that there must be at least some overlap between the writer's and the reader's schemata as well as between their linguistic and rhetorical resources. The wider the intersubjective distance is (the less there are commonality in the frame of reference shared by the writer and the reader), the more communicative competence the writer has to possess.

The foregoing contextual analysis of the writing situation and the concept of writing shows that even experienced language users face a demanding task when they engage in writing. When we analyze the task from the viewpoint of beginning writers, we realize that they face difficulties in all relations illustrated by Figure 1:

(a) they have limited knowledge and experience about external reality and, consequently, different referents, topics;

(b) they do not have an edaquate stock of schemata to support the processing of information;

(c) they have limited experience concerning different readers and of their response tendencies;

(d) they do not possess sufficient linguistic or rhetorical resources to be able to write a text which succeeds in conveying independent, literal meaning.

They may have difficulties also in the motor fluency of textproduction. The foregoing contextual analysis of the writing situation has revealed the essential factors that school-based writing has to cope with. At the same time, the analysis points out the determinants which have to be taken into account, when a model of school-based writing instruction is being planned.

3. The domain of school-based writing

During the planning phase of the IEA International Study of Written Composition it became obvious that there was a need for a model of writing which could be applied to the specification of writing tasks or assignments. The model was needed also for the analysis of teaching. Work on such a model was undertaken, even though it was recognized that it would necessarily be a simplification of reality. However, the merit of a model is that it takes due account of the central variables in schoolbased writing situations

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and of their relationships as they are realized in actual writing assignments.

The preceding discussion on the nature and value of writing led the present author to develop a general model of schoolbased writing. Its development was guided by the view that several dimensions must be considered when selecting and sequencing writing tasks in teaching and/or investigating learning outcomes. The preceding analysis of the concept of writing has shown that the important contextual factors in a writing situation can be characterized as: (a) cognitive demands related to the topic and content, (b) social and intersubjective demands of writing concerning the purpose and audience of writing, and, (c) linguistic and rhetorical demands of writing concerning the mode of discourse. The first two of these can be taken as the main dimensions if we wish to characterize the domain by means of a two-dimensional typology, as was considered useful.

As a consequence, the model poses "dominant intention/purpose" as one main dimension and "cognitive processing demands" as the other. Primary audience is related to the purpose of writing and primary content to the levels of cognitive processing. Cognitive processing elicits documentative, constative or exploratory discourse, which can be realized in a variety of text types. Thus, the model attempts to establish a balance between the modes and purposes of writing, which are conflated in some earlier model of written discourse based on traditional rhetorics. However, Leonard (1914) and Brewer (1980), for instance see cognitive processing, representing and expanding reality, as being related to the mode of writing.

The model is based on semiotic structure in that it takes account of the relationship between the writer, the reader, and the message. One of the major merits of the semiotic approach is that for curriculum planners, textbook writers and teachers, it calls attention to the purposes and functions of school writing.

The model is derived largely from the work of Bühler (1934) and Jakobson (1960). Recent models relevant to school writing, especially those by Moffett (1968), Britton et al. (1975) and Kinneavy (1980), also reflect a similar understanding of the interrelationships between writers, readers and texts. In adopting this approach a basic weakness of many models of writing instruction can be avoided, namely that the purpose and mode of writing have been considered largely synonymous. This view is probably based on the old rhetorical tradition, and the old rhetorical modes

(narration, description, exposition and argumentation) have been incorporated as such as the subcategories of writing purposes.

The present author believes, like Britton, that it would be advisable to keep in mind that rhetorical modes and their interpretations are derived from the analysis of the finished products of adult writers and speakers. If we, by contrast, start from Jakobson's classification of the functions of language (referential, metalingual, emotive, conative, phatic and poetic), we can conclude that narration and description, in particular, can be used for several purposes. Similarly, expository writing can also be used for referential purposes as well as for conative purposes. A model which links each of these rhetorical modes with a single specific function militates against flexible use of language. In this respect, the view adopted in the study is similar to the view expressed by Lauer et al. (1981), who make a clear distinction between the aims (which guide the choice of material) and the modes of writing (which are patterns of organizing the material).

3.1. Analysis of the main dimensions of the model

The figure shows that in outlining one of the two main dimensions of the model, the dominant purpose/intention, a decision was made to start from five main purposes which are related to the functions which Jakobson has described. However, it seemed more appropriate to use verbs rather than Jakobson's terms to designate the main purposes since the model appears to be relevant also to readers who are not experts in linguistics or to mother tongue teachers.

The following five main purposes were considered the most important in school-based writing: to learn (metalingual, mathetic), to convey emotions and feelings (emotive), to inform (referential), to convince/persuade (conative), to entertain, delight, or please (poetic). The learning purpose is considered to include not only the code-focused (metalingual, meta-communicative, or meta-interactive) function but also a more general function of learning (mathetic). Two very important purposes of writing in society have been omitted. The "archival" function of writing, ie. the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, is hardly relevant for beginning writers. The phatic function (to write in order to establish contact) was considered to be partly included in the referential (to write in order to inform) and conative function (to write in order to convince/persuade). If it were included, the most typical cognitive activity related do it would

Dominant Intention/ Purpose	Cognitive Processing / Primary Content / Primary Audience	I Reproduce	II Organize/Reorganize	III Invent/Generate
To learn (metalingual)	Self			
To convey emotions, feelings (emotive)	Self Others			
To inform (referential)	Others			
To convince/ persuade (conative)	Others			
To entertain, delight, please (poetic)	Others			
To keep in touch (phatic)	Others			

Figure 2. A general model of written discourse

probably be "organize/reorganize" and the most typical product a postcard. Practising such writing was considered marginal in school-based writing.

In spite of these two exclusions the purposes defined for writing cover quite well the central writing aims and needs of individuals and society.

Cognitive processes and modes of written discourse

The semiotic models proposed by Moffett, Britton and Kinneavy emphasize the purpose of writing. However, they tend not to give due attention to the other important dimension, the cognitive processes. The close connection between thinking and writing is pointed out, but the relationship is not elaborated in a manner that would be useful for writing in an educational context.

Examination of school writing from the point of view of both cognitive processing and the mode of discourse implies that the writers can represent and expand their views of the world at different levels of originality and maturity. Despite the fact that the cognitive processes underlying writing and thinking are very complex, the level of cognitive processing / cognitive demand of the writing tasks (cf. Bloom and al. 1956, Leonard 1914) was subcategorized as follows:

(1) receptive, recognizing and recalling modes of processing of information, in which the writer reproduces units, events, facts (eg. copies, cites, makes notes);

(2) analyzing and structuring modes of processing of information, in which the writer organizes or reorganizes reality (eg. narrates, describes, explains, summarizes);

(3) evaluating and generating modes of processing of information, in which the writer expands reality, invents/generates reality (eg. analyzes, expounds, argues, creates a new possible world).

Thus, the task demands increase as we move to the right along the horizontal axis of the model. Instead of a reproduction of ideas and language, students will have to come up with ideas of their own and with appropriate rhetorical and linguistic forms. This dimension highlights the fact that the most dominant feature of school writing situations is often the parameter of content (topic, theme). This is particularly true of beginning writers. If a significant amount of experience, observations, and knowledge is stored in long-term memory, even a beginning writer can direct

cognitive parameters of the writing situation (cf. eg. Augustine 1981, Bereiter 1981).

In the first category of the processing classification both content and language are given in task. In the second category content is though to be quite easily accessible from longterm memory, so the main effort is in the organization of ideas and in the ability to convey content through language. In the third category the content has to be generated together with organization and language.

The present writer suggests that the following classification of the mode of writing, which is largely based on traditional rhetoric, might prove useful in any evaluative study of written compositon:

1. Documentative discourse: material is recorded as such with little or no modification. This leads to copying but also to notes, short answers to questions in workbooks, stream of consciousness writing, etc.

2. Constative discourse:

   a. Narrative discourse: the writer reports on events and experiences. This leads to a story, narrative report, an account of events, news, etc.

   b. Descriptive discourse: the writer conveys to the audience a structured account of either a static state or dynamic process. This leads, on the one hand, to descriptions of objects, scenery, etc., on the other hand, to instructions how to use some machine, how to do something, or a description of a route to follow.

   c. Explanatory discourse: the writer conveys a logical account using such techniques as comparison, classification, and cause-effect. This leads to products like reports, technical descriptions, statements of personal views, opinions.

3. Exploratory discourse:

   a. Interpretive (expository/argumentative/persuasive discourse: the writer examines some material, classifies it and makes conclusions using induction, deduction and comparison. This may lead to changes of other people's actions or thinking and to products like book reviews, editorials, columns, essays which show what the writer thinks of some events, ideas, etc.

   b. Literary discourse, in which special attention is paid to the structure of the product. Experiences are made the object of conscious analysis by distancing them. They are given a well-considered structure, and special attention is paid to the choice of words and sentences. This leads to poems, plays, play with language resources, and creative experiments with language. In literary discourse, other modes of discourse may be used according to the purpose of the writer.

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Dominant Intention/Purpose	Primary Audience / Primary Content	I REPRODUCE: Linguistically Precoded/Predetermined Information	II ORGANIZE/REORGANIZE: Known Spatial/Temporal	II ORGANIZE/REORGANIZE: Known Phenomena, Concepts or Mental States	III INVENT/GENERATE: New or Alternative Spatial/Temporal	III INVENT/GENERATE: New or Alternative Phenomena, Concepts or Mental States
1. To learn (meta-lingual, mathetic)	Self	Copying Taking dictation	Retell a story (heard or read)	Note Resume Summary Outline Paraphrasing	Comments on book margins Metaphors Analogies	
2. To convey emotions, feelings (emotive)	Self Others	Stream of Consciousness	Personal story Personal diary Personal letter	Portrayal	Reflective writing -- Personal essays	The traditional
3. To inform (referential)	Others	Quote Fill in a form	Narrative report News Instruction Telegram Announcement Circular	Directions Description Technical description Biography Science report/experiment	Expository writing -- Definition -- Academic essay/article -- Book review -- Commentary	literary genres and modes can be placed
4. To convince persuade (conative)	Others	Citation from authority/expert	Letter of application Statement of personal views, opinions	Advertisement Letter or advice	Argumentative/persuasive writing -- Editorial -- Critical essay/article	under one or more
5. To entertain, delight, please (poetic)	Others	Quotation of poetry and prose	Given an ending-create a story Create an ending Retell a story	Word portrait or sketch Causerie	Entertainment writing -- Parody -- Rhymes	of these four purposes.
6. To keep in touch (phatic)	Others	Postcards	Postcards, letters			
		DOCUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE	REPORTORIAL DISCOURSE		EXPLORATORY DISCOURSE	

Figure 3. A general model of written discourse: attempted location of text types in the model

The two main dimensions of the model give a typology which can be tested by locating different types of written products in it. Figure 3 illustrates such an attempt, which is not meant to be an exhaustive classification of the types of written discourse. It is not supposed to convey the view that the way in which the text types have been used to illustrate the system is the only possible classification. Thus, a summary can be written for many purposes, for instance, to learn or to inform or to persuade. The same is true of many, perhaps most, text types.

As suggested earlier, no sharp distinction should be made between the level of cognitive processing and the modes of discourse. This connection is made by indicating at the bottom of the figure how the mode of discourse is related to the level of cognitive processing.

The model seeks to illustrate how complex and multi-dimensional the domain of school writing is, or could be. In consequence, it suggests strongly that the school has a demanding task in introducing children into the world of written communication. It is obvious that the school is responsible for providing varied writing situations (varied writing purposes, cognitive demands, audiences). At the same time, the model shows how many factors have to be taken into account in the attempts to secure the content representativeness of the tasks in the evaluation of writing skills.

The model has been employed to describe and evaluate types of written composition tasks used in different countries. It may also prove useful in discussions of the general approach - and also the quality - of the writing curriculum in schools (eg. the coverage of the curriculum and the sequencing of different types of writing tasks). It may also help us to make decisions on what kind of writing tasks can usefully be employed with pupils of different ages or at different levels of development.

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